Numb. CCCXXI.

The SPECTATOR.

Nec satis est pulchra esse poemata, dulcia sunto. Hor.

Saturday, March 8. 1712.

THOSE, who know how many Volumes have been written on the Poems of *Homer* and *Virgil*, will easily pardon the Length of my Discourse upon *Milton*. *The Paradise Lost* is look'd upon, by the best Judges, as the greatest Production, or at least the noblest Work of Genius, in our Language, and therefore deserves to be set before an *English* Reader in its full Beauty. For this Reason, tho' I have endeavoured to give a general Idea of the Beauties and Imperfections in my Six First Papers, I look upon my self obliged to bestow one upon every Book in particular. The Three First Books I have already dispatched, and am now entring upon the Fourth. I need not acquaint the Reader, that there are Multitudes of Beauties in this great Author, especially in the Descriptive Parts of his Poem, which I have not touched upon, it being my Intention to point out those only, which appear to me the most exquisite, or those which are not so obvious to ordinary Readers. Every one that has read the Criticks, who have written upon the *Odyssy*, the *Iliad* and the *Æneid*, knows very well that though they agree in their Opinions of the great Beauties in those Poems, they have nevertheless each of them discovered several Master-Strokes, which have escaped the Observation of the rest. In the same manner, I question not, but every Writer, who shall treat of this Subject after me, will find several Beauties in *Milton*, which I have not taken Notice of. I must likewise observe, that as the greatest Masters in Critical Learning differ among one another, as to particular Points in an Epic Poem, I have not bound my self scrupulously to the Rules, which any one of them has laid down upon that Art, but have taken the Liberty sometimes to join with one, and sometimes with another, and sometimes to differ from all of them, when I have thought the Reason of the thing was on my side.

We may consider the Beauties of the Fourth Book under three Heads. In the First are those Pictures of Still-Life, which we meet with in the Descriptions of *Eden*, *Paradise*, *Adam*'s Bower, *Eve*. In the next are the Machines, which comprehend the Speeches and Behaviour of the good and bad Angels. In the last is the Conduct of *Adam* and *Eve*, who are the principal Actors in the Poem.

In the Description of *Paradise*, the Poet has observed *Aristotle*'s Rule of lavishing all the Ornaments of Diction on the weak unactive Parts of the Fable, which are not supported by the Beauty of Sentiments and Characters. Accordingly the Reader may observe, that the Expressions are more figured and elaborate in these Descriptions, than in most other Parts of the Poem. I must further add, that tho' the Poet's Description of Gardens, Rivers, Rainbows, and the like Pieces of Nature, are justly censured in an Heroic Poem, when they run out into an unnecessary length; the Description of *Paradise* would have been faulty, had not the Poet been very particular in it, not only as it is the Scene of the principal Action, but as it is requisite to give us an Idea of that Happiness from which our first Parents fell. The Plan of it is wonderfully beautiful, and formed upon the short Account which we have of it, in Holy Writ. *Milton*'s Exuberance of Imagination, has pour'd forth such a redundancy of Ornaments on this Seat of Happiness and Innocence, that it would be endless to point out each Particular.

I must not quit this Head, without further observing, that there is scarce a Speech of *Adam* or *Eve* in the whole Poem, wherein the Sentiments and Allusions are not taken from that delightful Habitation. The Reader, during their whole Course of Action, always finds himself in the Walks of *Paradise*. In short, as the Criticks have remarked, that Pastoral Poems, wherein Shepherds are Actors, the Thoughts always take a Tincture from the Woods, Fields and Groves; so we may observe, that our First Parents seldom lose Sight of their happy Station in any thing they speak or do. Nay, if the Reader will give me leave to use the Expression, their Thoughts are always *Paradisiacal*.

I come in the next place to consider the Machines of the Fourth Book. *Satan* being now within Prospect of *Eden*, and looking round upon the Glories of the Creation, is filled with Sentiments different from those which he discovered whilst he was in Hell. The Place inspires him with Thoughts more adapted to it: He reflects upon the happy Condition from whence he fell, and breaks forth into a Speech that is softned with several transient Touches of Remorse and Self-accusation: But at length he confirms himself in Impenitence, and in his design of drawing Man into his own State of Guilt and Misery. This Conflict of Passions is raised with a great deal of Art, as the opening of his Speech to the Sun is very bold and noble.

O thou that with surpassing Glory crown'd
Look'st from thy Sole Dominion like the God
Of this new World, at whose Sight all the Stars
Hide their diminish'd heads, to thee I call
But with no Friendly Voice, and add thy name
O Sun, to tell thee how I hate thy beams
That bring to my remembrance from what State
I fell, how glorious once above thy Sphere.

This Speech is, I think, the finest that is ascribed to *Satan* in the whole Poem. The Evil Spirit afterwards proceeds to make his Discoveries concerning our first Parents, and to learn after what manner they may be best attacked. His bounding over the Walls of *Paradise*; his sitting in the Shape of a Cormorant upon the Tree of Life, which stood in the Center of it, and over-topp'd all the other Trees of the Garden; his alighting among the Herd of Animals, which are so beautifully represented as playing about *Adam* and *Eve*, together with his transforming himself into different Shapes, in order to hear their Conversation, are Circumstances that give an agreeable Surprize to the Reader, and are devised with great Art, to connect that Series of Adventures in which the Poet has engaged this great Artificer of Fraud.

His planting himself at the Ear of *Eve* in the shape of a Toad, in order to produce vain Dreams and Imaginations, is a Circumstance of the same Nature, as his starting up in his own Form is wonderfully fine, both in the Literal Description, and in the Moral which is concealed under it. His Answer upon his being discovered, and demanded to give an Account of himself, are conformable to the Pride and Intrepidity of his Character.

Know ye not then, said Satan, *fill'd with Scorn,*
Know ye not me? ye knew me once no mate
For you, there sitting where you durst not soare;
Not to know me argues your selves unknown,
The lowest of your throng; ——

Zephon's Rebuke, with the Influence it had on *Satan*, is exquisitely Graceful and Moral. *Satan* is afterwards led away to *Gabriel*, the chief of the Guardian Angels, who kept watch in *Paradise*. His disdainful Behaviour on this occasion is so remarkable a Beauty, that the most ordinary Reader cannot but take notice of it. *Gabriel*'s discovering his approach at a distance, is drawn with great strength and liveliness of Imagination.

O Friends, I hear the tread of nimble Feet
Hasting this way, and now by glimps discern
Ithuriel and Zephon through the shade;
And with them comes a third of Regal Port,
But faded splendor wan; who by his gait
And fierce demeanor seems the Prince of Hell,
Not likely to part hence without contest;
Stand firm, for in his look defiance lours.

The Conference between *Gabriel* and *Satan* abounds with Sentiments proper for the Occasion, and suitable to the Persons of the two Speakers. *Satan*'s cloathing himself with Terror when he prepares for the Combat is truly sublime, and at least equal to *Homer*'s Description of Discord celebrated by *Longinus*, or to that of Fame in *Virgil*, who are both represented with their Feet standing upon the Earth, and their Heads reaching above the Clouds.

While thus he spake, th' Angelic Squadron bright
Turn'd fiery red, sharpning in mooned Horns
Their Phalanx, and began to hem him round
With ported Spears, &c.

On

——On th' other side, Satan alarm'd,
Collecting all his might d lited stood
Like Teneriff or Atlas unremov'd.
His Stature reach'd the Sky, and on his Crest
Sat Horrour plum'd;——

I must here take notice by the way, that *Milton* is every where full of Hints, and sometimes literal Translations, taken from the greatest of the *Greek* and *Latin* Poets. But this I shall reserve for a Discourse by it self, because I would not break the Thread of these Speculations that are designed for *English* Readers, with such Reflections as would be of no use but to the Learned.

I must however observe in this Place, that the breaking off the Combat between *Gabriel* and *Satan*, by the hanging out of the Golden Scales in Heaven, is a Refinement upon *Homer*'s Thought, who tells us, that before the Battel between *Hector* and *Achilles*, *Jupiter* weighed the Event of it in a pair of Scales. The Reader may see the whole Passage in the 22d *Iliad*.

Virgil, before the last decisive Combat, describes *Jupiter* in the same manner, as weighing the Fates of *Turnus* and *Æneas*. *Milton*, though he fetched this beautiful Circumstance from the *Iliad* and *Æneid*, does not only insert it as a Poetical Embellishment, like the Authors above-mentioned; but makes an artful use of it for the proper carrying on of his Fable, and for the breaking off the Combat between the two Warriors, who were upon the point of engaging.

I must here take Notice under the Head of the Machines, that *Gabriel*'s gliding down to the Earth upon a Sun-beam, with the Poet's Device to make him *descend*, as well in his return to the Sun, as in his coming from it, is a Prettiness that might have been admired in a little fanciful Poet, but seems below the Genius of *Milton*. The Description of the Host of armed Angels walking their nightly Round in *Paradise*, is of another Spirit.

So saying, on he led his radiant files,
Dazling the Moon;——

As that Account of the Hymns which our first Parents used to hear them Sing in these their Midnight Walks, is altogether Divine, and inexpressibly amusing to the Imagination.

We are, in the last place, to consider the Parts which *Adam* and *Eve* act in the Fourth Book. The Description of them as they first appear'd to *Satan*, is exquisitely drawn, and sufficient to make the fallen Angel gaze upon them with all that Astonishment, and those Emotions of Envy, in which he is represented.

Two of far nobler Shape erect and tall,
God-like erect, with native honour clad
In naked majesty seem'd lords of all,
And worthy seem'd, for in them looks divine
The image of their glorious Maker shon,
Truth, Wisdom, Sanctitude severe and pure;
Severe, but in true filial freedom plac'd:
For contemplation he and valour form'd,
For softness she and sweet attractive Grace;
He for God only, she for God in him:
His fair large front, and eye sublime declar'd
Absolute rule; and Hyacinthin Locks
Round from his parted forelock manly hung
Clustring, but not beneath his Shoulders broad:
She as a Veil down to her slender waist
Her unadorned golden tresses wore
Dis-shevel'd, but in wanton ringlets wav'd,
So pass'd they naked on, nor shun'd the Sight
Of God or Angel, for they thought no ill:
So hand in hand they pass'd, the loveliest pair
That ever since in loves embraces met.

There is a fine Spirit of Poetry in the Lines which follow, wherein they are described as sitting on a Bed of Flowers by the side of a Fountain, amidst a mixed Assembly of Animals.

The Speeches of these two first Lovers flow equally from Passion and Sincerity. The Professions they make to one another are full of Warmth; but at the same time founded on Truth. In a word, they are the Gallantries of *Paradise*.

——When Adam first of Men,——
Sole partner and sole part of all these joys
Dearer my self than all;——
But let us ever praise him, and extol
His bounty, following our delightful task,
To prune those growing plants, and tend these flowers,
Which were it toilsome, yet with thee were sweet.
To whom thus Eve reply'd, O thou for whom
And from whom I was form'd, flesh of thy flesh,
And without whom am to no end, my Guide
And head, what thou hast said is just and right.
For we to him indeed all praises owe,
And daily thanks, I chiefly who enjoy
So far the happier Lot, enjoying thee
Preeminent by so much odds, while thou
Like consort to thy self canst no where find, &c.

The remaining part of *Eve*'s Speech, in which she gives an Account of her self upon her first Creation, and the manner in which she was brought to *Adam*, is I think as beautiful a Passage as any in *Milton*, or perhaps in any other Poet whatsoever. These Passages are all work'd off with so much Art, that they are capable of pleasing the most delicate Reader without offending the most severe.

That day I oft remember, when from Sleep, &c.

A Poet of less Judgment and Invention than this great Author, would have found it very difficult to have filled those tender parts of the Poem with Sentiments proper for a State of Innocence; to have described the warmth of Love and the Professions of it, without Artifice or Hyperbole; to have made the Man speak the most endearing things, without descending from his natural Dignity, and the Woman receiving them without departing from the Modesty of her Character; in a word, to adjust the Prerogatives of Wisdom and Beauty, and make each appear to the other in its proper Force and Loveliness. This mutual Subordination of the two Sexes is wonderfully kept up in the whole Poem, as particularly in the Speech of *Eve* I have before-mentioned, and upon the Conclusion of it in the following Lines.

So spake our general Mother, and with eyes
Of Conjugal attraction unreprov'd,
And meek surrender, half embracing lean'd
On our first father, half her swelling breast
Naked met his under the flowing Gold
Of her loose tresses hid; he in delight
Both of her beauty and submissive charms
Smil'd with Superiour Love,——

The Poet adds, that the Devil turn'd away with Envy at the sight of so much Happiness.

We have another View of our First Parents in their following Discourses, which is full of pleasing Images and Sentiments suitable to their Condition and Characters. The Speech of *Eve*, in particular, is dress'd up in such a Variety and natural Turn of Words and Sentiments, as cannot be sufficiently admired.

I shall close my Reflections upon this Book, with observing the Masterly Transition which the Poet makes to their Evening Worship, in the following Lines.

Thus on their shadie lodge arriv'd, both stood,
Both turn'd, and under open Sky ador'd
The God that made both Air, Earth and Heav'n,
Which they beheld, the Moons resplendent Globe
And Starry Pole: Thou also mad'st the night,
Maker omnipotent, and thou the Day, &c.

Most of the Modern Heroic Poets have imitated the Ancients, in beginning a Speech without premising, that the Person said thus or thus; but as it is easie to imitate the Ancients in the Omission of two or three Words, it requires Judgment to do it in such a manner as they shall not be miss'd, and that the Speech may begin naturally without them. This is a fine Instance of this Kind out of *Homer*, in the Two Third Chapter of *Longinus*.

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